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NATIONAL BUILDINGS RECORD

Exhibition of
Photographs and Drawings
of
English Architecture

007

THE ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN
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1946

NATIONAL BUILDINGS RECORD

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Introduction

THE National Buildings Record was set up in February, 1941, with the immediate object of assembling records of valuable buildings which had been or might be damaged in the course of the war. It was initiated at a conference convened by the Royal Institute of British Architects, and has received annually a grant from the Treasury. In addition, it has been generously supported by the Rockefeller Foundation, the Pilgrim Trust, and the Leverhulme Trust. These foundations have made it possible for the N.B.R. to develop fully the two complementary sides of its work—*co-ordination* and *active recording*.

CO-ORDINATION. It was known, at the start, that substantial parts of a record of English architecture existed in public and private hands. The most important of these was the Conway Collection of the *Courtauld Institute of Art* (University of London) and the Institute placed this at the disposal of the N.B.R. for the duration of the war. The services of the Conway Librarian were also made available and the filing methods of the Conway Library adopted.

Further co-ordination has been effected principally by the maintenance of a General Index of photographs and another of drawings. These indexes, arranged topographically, cover important national collections such as that of the Victoria and Albert Museum and also local and private collections. In the case of collections of negatives situated in areas liable to attack, prints have, wherever possible, been acquired.

The current work of recording organizations has also been co-ordinated from the start. The *Royal Commissions on Historical Monuments* for England and Wales, whose normal work was suspended at the outbreak of war, obtained authority to collaborate with the N.B.R., and their diminished staffs have undertaken photography and measured drawing in various parts of the country. The *Royal Commission on Historical Monuments* (Scotland) has also contributed assistance in the northern counties of England.

The *Central Council for the Care of Churches* had, in 1941, already initiated a scheme for the photography of churches on a voluntary basis, either directly or through diocesan committees. Through this organization amateur photographers have made a valuable contribution, the Central Council's activities being recorded on the N.B.R. General Index.

The *Warburg Institute* associated itself with the aims of the N.B.R. soon after the latter's formation and has worked in close collaboration. A member of the Institute's staff has conducted detailed photographic surveys of buildings of special artistic importance in the London area.

In addition, the work of local Archaeological and Field clubs and of individual amateur photographers throughout the country has, so far as possible, been directed into channels appropriate to the purposes of the N.B.R.

ACTIVE RECORDING. The main objective of the N.B.R.'s active recording is to obtain photographs and drawings of buildings not hitherto adequately dealt with. The first step was to draw up programmes of work—London, the industrial towns, and ports being the obvious priorities. In due course the lists prepared by architects under the Ministry of Works Salvage Panel Scheme became available and these now provide a framework of information. Most of the places covered by N.B.R. photographers have, however, been investigated by a member of the staff and instructions drafted on the spot. The knowledge of local architects and antiquaries has been an important source of information.

Damaged buildings of architectural merit receive attention whether previously photographed or not. Where the remains are likely to be cleared, a measured survey is obtained.

Measured drawings are made when urgently required, but the operation is, of course, too slow to keep pace with the photographic survey. Photostat copies of existing drawings form part of the collection, and students in the Schools of Architecture have been organized to assist the record so far as circumstances permit.

PRESENT SCOPE AND CONTENTS. At the present stage the N.B.R. has recorded the important historic buildings in about 60 English towns and in certain coastal and other areas. About 25,000 photographs have been commissioned in the past three years. Purchases and gifts of prints or negatives, including those deposited by bodies co-ordinated with the N.B.R., account for over 100,000. Thus, with the Conway Collection's approximate total of 100,000, the photographic record stands at about 225,000 items. This does not include the totals of allied collections represented on the General Index.

THE N.B.R. AND THE FUTURE. It is intended to proceed with the survey of English architecture, and arrangements are in hand to provide for the inclusion of architecture of the present day. No decision has yet been reached regarding the permanent establishment of the N.B.R. The form it has taken is directly due to the conditions under which it has come into existence; but the organization has been developed on the assumption that its work will be permanently available and useful to the public.

Tawstock, Devon: Bourchier monuments
N.B.R. photo by Margaret Tomlinson

St. Paul's Cathedral: West tower

Warburg Institute photo by H. Gernsheim

Notes on the Exhibition

THE main part of the Exhibition (Panels 1–17) illustrates various aspects of English architecture in roughly chronological order. The photographs are selected from those taken during the past three years by the N.B.R. or by the Warburg Institute, to whose work Panels 5, 9, 10, 11, and 14 are devoted. Where not otherwise stated the photographs are the copyright of the N.B.R. or (in the case of the 5 screens mentioned) the Warburg Institute. Panels 18–22 show records of war-damaged buildings. Panels 23 and 24 display prints from private collections relevant to the work of the N.B.R., while Panels 25 and 26 are devoted to drawings and photostats.

PANEL 1. *Regional Types.*

The vernacular architecture of Britain, with its innumerable examples, illustrating many variations in material and technique, is the largest field with which recording has to deal. This panel merely suggests some of its aspects, such as regional contrasts in style and materials. The N.B.R. has as yet only touched the fringe of this field, since under war conditions individual buildings of value rather than examples of widespread types are the essential subjects. The need for a record of the traditional types of English architecture will, however, increase under the pressure of changing conditions. Useful contributions in this direction might very well be made after the war by local Field and Photographic Clubs.

PANEL 2. *The Village Church and its Contents.*

Some hundreds of village churches, especially in coastal areas and in the neighbourhood of industrial towns, have been photographed by the N.B.R. Apart from the intrinsic historic interest of these buildings, they are to a great extent the repositories of the finest English craftsmanship and sculpture. The panel is designed to emphasize this by showing sculptural details recorded in churches whose fabrics are unelaborate. The number of photographs required to record a village church depends largely on its contents and may vary between half a dozen and six dozen exposures. Extensive recording of churches throughout the country has been organized by the Central Council for the Care of Churches.

PANEL 3. *Greater Churches.*

This panel displays photographs from surveys of churches important for their structure rather than their contents. The Norwich church

exemplifies the town churches of the older cities, which have now been exhaustively recorded. The five photographs of 13th-century capitals from Slimbridge, Glos., are part of a complete record of this important series of Gothic carvings.

PANEL 4. *Churches and Cathedrals.*

The panel comprises selected photographs from 'supplementary' surveys of Durham and Lichfield Cathedrals and St. Botolph's Church, Boston. In the case of buildings of this calibre substantial photographic records have been made in the past, and the N.B.R. has undertaken the co-ordination of existing material before photographing those parts of the fabric not certainly covered in existing collections. These supplementary surveys, however, usually amount to 100–250 exposures and include the post-reformation monuments, hitherto rarely photographed.

PANEL 5. *Sculpture in Westminster Abbey.*

This panel is contributed by the Warburg Institute, which has worked in close association with the N.B.R. since 1941. The Institute's photographic activities have been concentrated on individual London buildings and sculptures of special importance, the monuments in Westminster Abbey being among the first subjects chosen. The medieval monuments had been evacuated to a place of safety, where, detached from their architectural settings, it was possible to photograph them satisfactorily in detail for the first time. Some of the results are shown here, together with details of later monuments still in the Abbey. It has only lately come to be realized that the Abbey, in addition to its medieval glories, is one of the finest repositories of Baroque sculpture in Europe.

PANEL 6. *Mural Monuments.*

The parish churches of England contain hundreds of thousands of monuments, dating from the middle ages to the 19th century. When the bulk of these has been recorded in photographs the result will form, in effect, an illustrated Dictionary of National Biography. But the biographical importance of these monuments takes second place to their artistic value which is often very great. All the finest sculptors up to Victorian times undertook commissions for church monuments, and smaller craftsmen often excelled in the work. Monuments are among the most perishable parts of a church in the event of damage by fire, and the N.B.R. has therefore made a special effort to secure a large representation of them in the collection.

PANEL 7. *Country Towns (Streets and Houses).*

The photographs, drawn from N.B.R. surveys of English towns, illustrate the character of their traditional street architecture, chiefly of the 18th century. The five photographs of Nelson Street, King's Lynn, are part of a series recording an entire street of outstanding architectural value, dating from the 15th to 18th centuries. The interiors of the principal houses, for example the one shown in the centre photograph, have been included in the survey. Wherever possible, small-scale drawings of entire streets have been obtained.

PANEL 8. *Country Towns (Public Buildings).*

The photographs, like those on the previous panel, are drawn from N.B.R. town surveys, and are grouped to represent the types of public architecture found in many country towns. These include town halls, shire halls and county courts, schools and almshouses, naval and military buildings, market halls and crosses, usually the work of local craftsmen and architects.

PANEL 9. *St. Paul's Cathedral.*

Contributed by the Warburg Institute, this panel displays a selection from a detailed survey of the Cathedral and its sculptures. It is a curious fact that, although St. Paul's is one of the few cathedrals of which complete measured drawings exist, it had never been comprehensively photographed before the present survey was undertaken.

PANEL 10. *London Churches.*

Christ Church, Spitalfields, and St. Martin's-in-the-Fields are two London churches of similar date but strikingly different architectural idiom—the one in the Baroque style of Hawksmore, the other in the Palladian of Gibbs. Both churches have been the subject of detailed photography by the Warburg Institute. Of special interest are the details of plaster decoration in St. Martin's, rarely noticed and never appreciated at their full value in the dim light of the church.

PANEL 11. *Georgian Interiors.*

Details from three important houses in towns which have been subject to enemy attack. Fydell House, Boston, was damaged early in the war, but the damage did not extend to the staircase shown here. In contrast to this early 18th-century example are the Rococo staircase at Royal Fort House, Bristol, and the room at Marlborough House, Falmouth, with its early 19th-century French wall-paper. Domestic

interiors of architectural value are not always easy to locate. The N.B.R. has, however, drawn upon the knowledge of local architects and antiquaries, often with unexpected and interesting results.

PANEL 12. *Late 18th-Century Ornament.*

This panel displays photographs from the records of two exceptionally fine London examples of classical ornament. The interior of the Chapel at Greenwich Hospital, reconstructed by James Stuart after a fire in 1779, is in a complex and elaborate style unusual in English architecture and independent of the manner introduced by the Adam brothers, whose very different characteristics are seen in the other subjects of this panel, the interior of Home House, Portman Square, designed by Robert Adam in 1775. Both these buildings have been photographed by the Warburg Institute.

PANEL 13. *Terraces, Crescents, and Villas.*

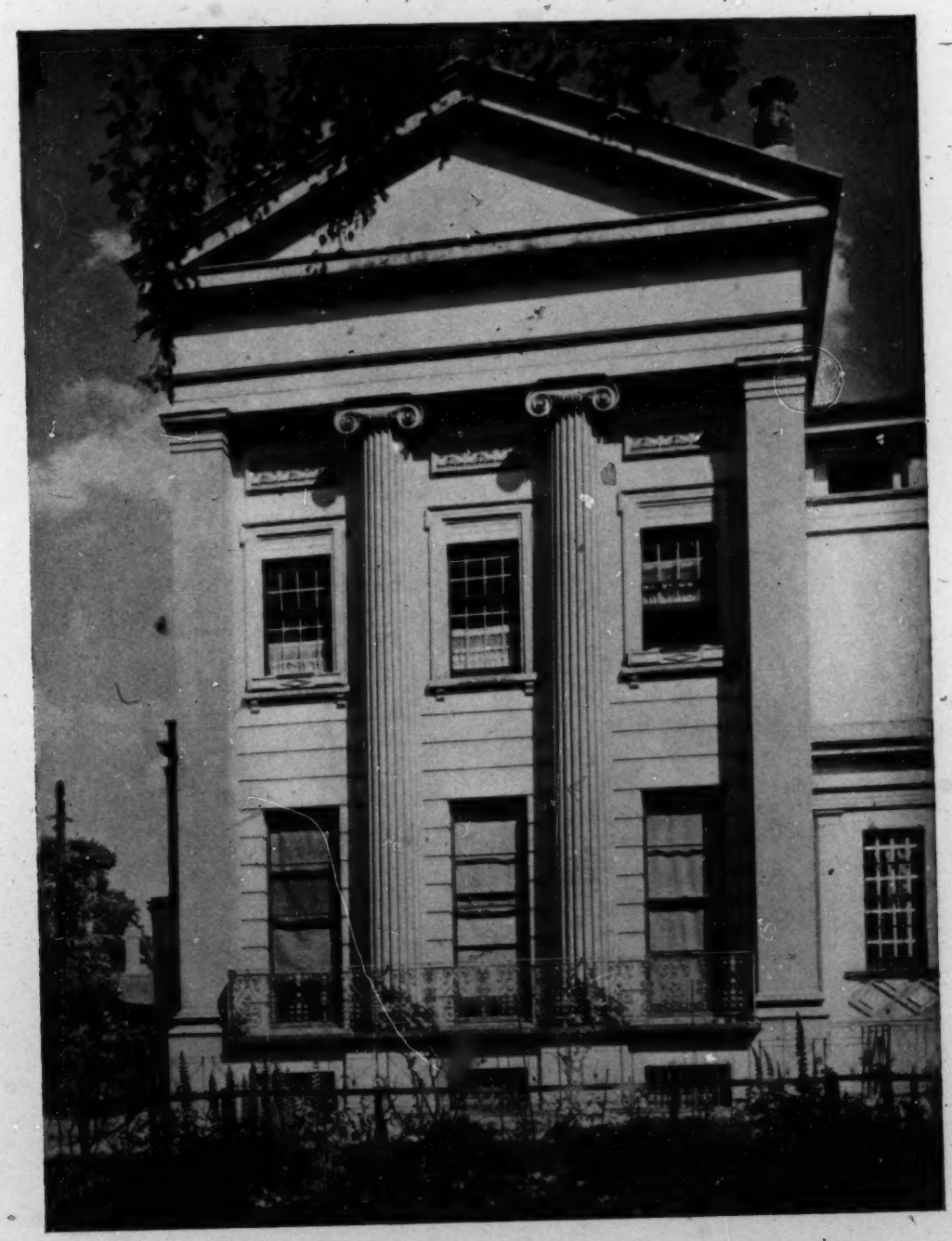
The grouped residences of the late 18th and early 19th centuries are among the major English contributions to architecture. They are seen at their best in the outskirts of spas like Bath, Clifton, Cheltenham, and Tunbridge Wells, though the most striking example of all is probably John Nash's famous lay-out at Regent's Park. Nash's terraces are being recorded in drawings and composite photographs, and the same method has been employed on selected examples in provincial towns. The five Cheltenham photographs give some idea of the originality, refinement, and variety which some early 19th-century architecture possesses.

PANEL 14. *Four London Club-houses.*

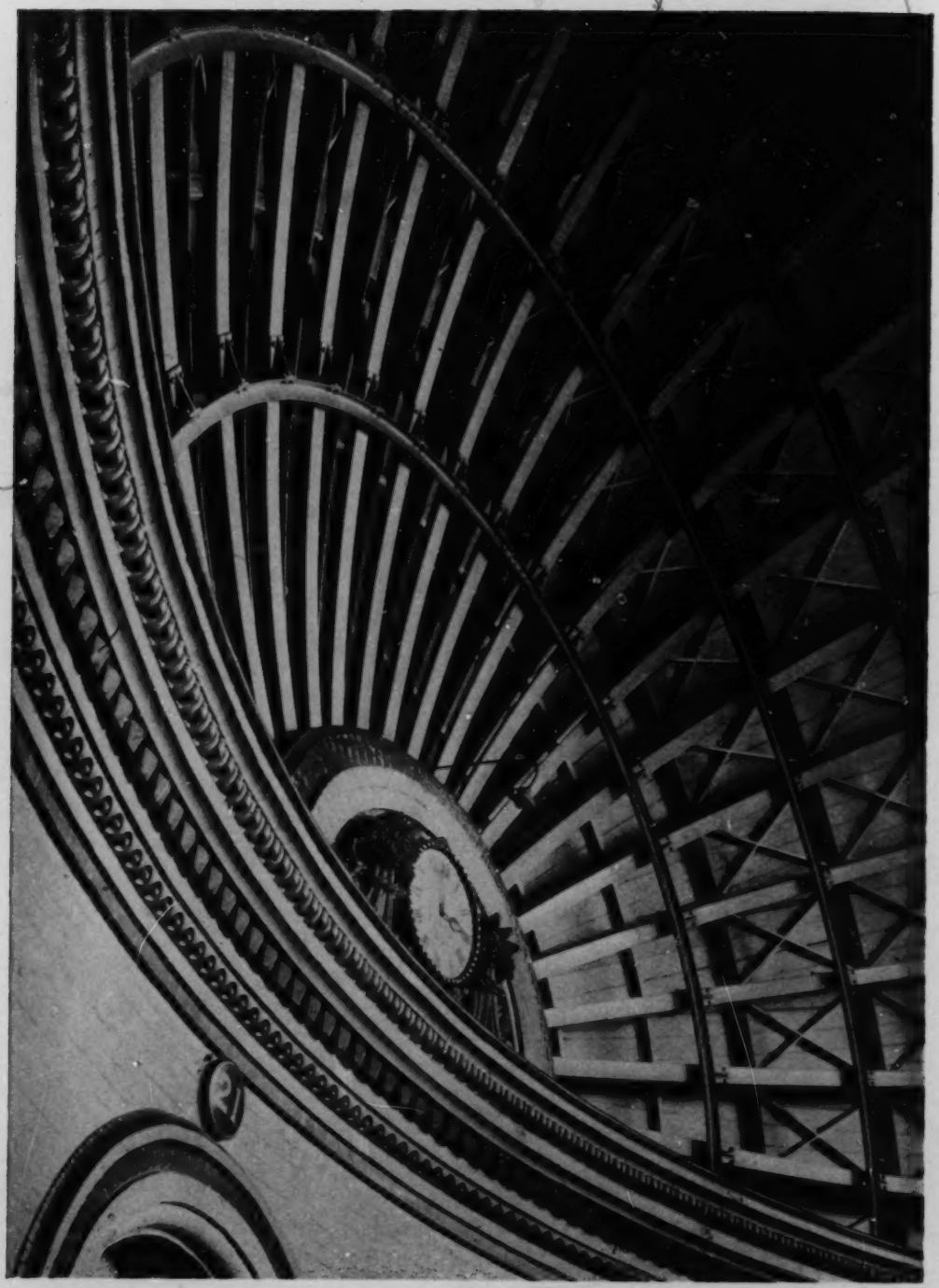
The architecture of the London club-houses of the 18th and early 19th centuries stands somewhere between the domestic and the monumental. Their interiors are not only admirable architecture but furnished in a manner ordained by the standards of style and ease appropriate to the last century. All the club-houses of major architectural value have been recorded by the N.B.R. or, as in the instances shown, by the Warburg Institute.

PANEL 15. *Industrial Towns.*

For obvious reasons industrial towns received early attention in the N.B.R.'s programme of work. The architecture they contain is often overlooked because of its relatively unattractive setting, but much of it is valuable from the aesthetic as well as the sociological point of view. Most of the 'black' towns contain examples of Georgian planning, and individual buildings by distinguished architects. The 19th century married Gothic architecture to banks and offices, as instanced in the



Cheltenham: Dorset House, Pittville Ride
N.B.R. photo by G. Bernard Mason



Leeds: Corn Exchange

N.B.R. photo by G. Bernard Wood

works of Scott and Waterhouse, and produced, at the same time, engineering as imaginative as the roof of the Corn Exchange at Leeds, shown on this panel, and illustrated opposite.

PANEL 16. *Victorian Gothic.*

Some of the best works of the Gothic Revival (for example, St. Alban's, Holborn, and St. Agnes's, Kennington) were destroyed in 1940–41 and the scarcity of good photographs of these buildings emphasized the existence of a serious gap in the record of English architecture. The panel shows examples of Victorian Gothic buildings ranging from the pioneer works of A. W. Pugin to the technical excellence of J. L. Pearson's Cathedral at Truro. The N.B.R. has attempted to cover the best Victorian examples in industrial towns and coastal areas, a policy justified by the fact that some of the churches shown on this panel have been damaged since these records were made.

PANEL 17. *Theatres.*

An investigation by the N.B.R. of photographic records of English theatres revealed their almost complete absence. All the principal auditoria in London and some in the provinces have therefore been photographed. They are rarely of great architectural distinction but have an obvious interest as the settings of theatrical history and as links in the evolution of theatre design. The selection on this panel includes the famous Theatre Royal at Bristol, dating from the end of the 18th century, and a series of four comparative views of auditoria showing the evolution from pillar-supported balconies in wood and iron to the steel cantilever construction of modern times.

PANELS 18–20. *War Damage* I–III.

When the N.B.R. started work, bombing had already destroyed much valuable architecture, including Coventry Cathedral and some of the London City churches. The recording of these buildings is, therefore, of necessity retrospective and fragmentary. Useful records have come to light in the course of the indexing work, but they are in most cases far from complete. The group of photographs of St. Lawrence Jewry (Panel 19) shows the kind of selection which it is possible to assemble, from various sources, in the case of a City church; details of monuments and woodwork are missing. At Coventry (Panel 18) it happens that the reverse is the case; details of the fittings are available but the fabric as a whole is poorly represented. In contrast, the photographs of St. George's-in-the-East are part of a substantial set of photographs taken by the N.B.R. very shortly before the church was burnt.

PANEL 21. *War Damage* IV.

The Inns of Court, where damage was severe, have been made the subject of a comprehensive record in drawings and photographs. The record, parts of which are shown here, has been built up from photographs and from surveys of damaged buildings before the debris was cleared.

PANEL 22. *War Damage* V.

The panel illustrates some of the cases where war damage has revealed details or characteristics of archaeological and technical interest. The examples shown range from a bastion of London's medieval wall to the archaic iron frame of a Victorian warehouse.

PANELS 23 & 24. *Photographs from Private Collections.*

These panels indicate the importance of collections in private hands and include selections from those of *Country Life Ltd.* and *Bedford Lemere Ltd.* Many of the photographs are of great historic interest, apart from their value as technically excellent records.

PANELS 25 & 26. *Drawings and Photostats.*

The N.B.R. has acquired and commissioned only a limited number of drawings, but the field has been to some extent covered by (*a*) the indexing of collections and publications (including standard works and architectural periodicals), and (*b*) the acquisition of photostat copies of drawings in private hands or made by the students of Schools of Architecture in the course of their studies. The panels show a number of these photostat reproductions as well as original drawings, including copies of glass and mural painting made in connexion with the N.B.R.'s work, and represented in the collection by photographic prints.

The Arts Council are glad to have the opportunity of touring this Exhibition prepared by the National Buildings Record.

NATIONAL BUILDINGS RECORD

ALL SOULS COLLEGE, OXFORD

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Photography has been commissioned in specific programmes of work, but the following have operated continuously for the N.B.R.:

HERBERT FELTON
G. BERNARD MASON
MARGARET TOMLINSON, M.A. (Cantab.)
G. BERNARD WOOD

Warburg Institute photographs are the work of HELMUT GERNSHEIM, *except in the cases of the Athenaeum and Reform Clubs and 20 Portman Square which are by* OTTO FEIN. *In all cases the work was directed by* DR. R. WITTKOWER.

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